Ouroboros

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Ouroboros

by drinkbloodlikewine, whiskeyandspite

Summary

“How did it feel?” His gaze trails to the scars again, head tilting, neck pale. “When he cut you.”

Again the gentle shift in Hannibal’s throat, the barely visible tic that suggests a blink that never comes. He’s poised, wire-taut and patient, letting his eyes linger on the fingers gently turning the filter between them. He considers how the smoke still lingers in the air, knows he’ll smell it for days, wonders if it will seep into the carpet, into his suit…

“Like a reminder.” he said softly, “That a wolf will never be a house pet.”

A therapy session, an oral fixation. That's as much as you need to know. Freud would be proud.

An early birthday present for bansheegrahamtao because... we started writing this and it became a monster. HAPPY BIRTHDAY BB WE LOVE YOU!!

Notes

Whiskeyandspite has a habit of collecting collab partners, and this is her first time writing Hannibal in a collab story. It's been way too much fun.

The first of (hopefully) many collabs between drinkbloodlikewine and whiskeyandspite. Comments are met with unholy happy sounds and rolling on the floor in a pleased frenzy.

Chapter 1

Will tries to tap his fingers in time to the clicking of the car's engine, tries to find its rhythm to steady himself by, but it's too uneven. Too broken. The pull of other therapies long past are embedded inside him like fishhooks, tugging this way and that, each one taking its ounce of flesh. Close your eyes and concentrate on the tapping of my fingers. Focus on the metronome as it swings. Breathe deep. Listen to my voice. Lights snapping like flashbulbs.

He draws a deep breath and tries to forget them all. The soft sigh pools past his lips in a pale cloud as he emerges into the winter night, several hours' dark, and he decides to focus on his breath instead, watching as it expands and passes over him while he walks.

He waits outside of the building until precisely 7:27. Grasps the cold metal handle and swings it wide. Shrugs out of his coat, hangs it on the rack with a tidying sweep of hand, and fidgets only mildly with the collar of his shirt and the sleeves of his sweater until 7:29. Four deep breaths, counted out, and finally he knocks.

7:30 precisely.

Hannibal barely looks up from his writing. He doesn't need to check the time to know it's exactly on the half hour, he knows Will has taken to arriving early to ensure being on time. It's admirable, in its own strange way, and just as vexing.

Will is changing and Hannibal doesn't know what spurred it.

He hopes, of course, his own work had done it, that he had influenced the younger man enough to be punctual on his own, come to his hand like a well-trained pet, and yet… he doesn't want him trained. He wants the Will Graham that had set someone to kill him from behind bars, he wants the Will Graham that sees a killer and stifles the same desire in his own heart.

He stands slowly, fingers lingering on the page as he watches the ink reflect the light in the room before it settles, dries on the page for good. Then he does the button up on his coat - second down - and makes his way to the door, opening it with a gentle sweep and a gentler smile.

"Will." he murmurs, eyes quick to take in the man before him, to appreciate that, again, he had made the effort to present himself carefully for a session. "Please, come in."

"Thank you," Will replies, steady in tone and steady in breath and steady in the steps that carry him into the office. Darkness and red crimson scarlet blood all around, pale arches of the balustrade above glimmering in low light like teeth in the maw of the Leviathan. In an unusual break from his recent patterns, Will doesn't complete his usual circuit of the room, fingers tracing desk and ladder and bookshelves all the way to the patient seat in a collapsing spiral. Oh no, he tells himself, you're inside the Ouroboros now, not following its endless tail.

Instead, he simply goes to the chair - his chair - and sinks into it.

His fingers spread wide, grazing leather and metal, skin and steel, and he knows that he's tense, knows just as Lecter must know or maybe just after, and corrects himself, instead relaxing his hands onto his thighs. He lets his gaze settle on the box of tissues beside the doctor's seat, within Lecter's reach but not that of his patient.

Of course.

"How are you, Doctor?" he asks, all Southern bearing in his creme brulee smile. Wholesome. Genial. A veneer of scorched sweetness.

"I am well," the reply is slow in coming, thoughtful. Hannibal had watched Will resist his habits to touch, to reacquaint himself with the room. He had watched Will take in the surroundings as an animal would in a new cage.

When he moves to sit, he undoes the button on his coat, again, settles with one knee crossed over the other, hands resting clasped on top.

He doesn't offer him wine, not here. He would have, when their sessions had been just conversations.

With a strange tug, he suddenly misses that.

"I have been passing my time as one would be expected to, on vacation." his smile barely quirks the corners of his lips, doesn't touch his eyes. "Although I fear I am not meant for long periods without my work."

Driven to distraction, driven to boredom. Boredom was a dangerous thing for Hannibal Lecter.

He regards his patient, notes how although Will doesn't meet his eyes he doesn't turn his gaze away, settles it just behind his left ear. Hannibal waits, for the pause to grow heavy enough for Will's eyes to shift to his a moment. This time when he smiles, his lips don't move at all, but his entire expression softens with the gentle narrowing of his eyes.

"You must have felt the same way when prison prevented you from working." he ventures.

Will breaks their eye contact despite himself, briefly faltering, unsure if holding it or losing it meant that he'd lost that round. He watches his hands in his lap for a moment before relaxing back into the chair, nearly slouching.

"I don't know that it prevented me from working," Will responds, consideringly, "so much as it frustrated my efforts to do so."

He's careful now, careful not to lose this next tilt as his pale blue eyes light on Hannibal's. "Do you leave your work entirely behind, when you're on hiatus? Or do you bring it with you?" He pauses, another pale smile blossoming and fading. "I find it hard to let mine go."

"Your work," Hannibal starts, "Is not like mine, where you can set aside records, or names, and detach yourself from them." he tilts his head just a little to keep Will's eyes on him, eyelids flickering enough to suggest a blink without blinking.

“The things you do, Will, the things you are capable of, are beyond my skill set. They are beyond most people. You find it hard to let it go because it would imply that you have to let yourself go.”

Become someone other.

The words hang between them, unspoken and heavy. Hannibal doesn’t answer Will’s question for a long time before he presses his lips together in gentle thought and takes a breath.

“I set my work aside whenever I leave this office. It does not come home with me.” he smiles again, a quirk of lips, directing his eyes down, mirroring Will’s earlier motion.

“My home is a place for other pursuits. Hobbies. My own time.”

He allows his gaze to return to Will again, keeping it low but steadily on him.

“Have you found a way to reconcile yourself? Find time and space for the things that matter outside of the FBI?”

Will’s fingers stretch against each other, a little flutter of movement in his lap - a distraction display, biologists would call it. He lets his eyes shift from Hannibal’s own dark gaze to the angles of his face, the peculiar twitches of muscle, all entirely in his control except for those that aren’t.

“I’ve had a chorus of voices trying to tell me who I am,” he replies evenly. “All vying for space. Trying to occupy. If we’re being honest,” a pause, a breath, just enough to let the question linger, “then I’m still trying to figure out which ones were right. That would help me to figure out which ones were…”

He pauses, tongue parting his lips briefly as though tasting the air for the right word.

“Misleading,” he finally settles. He shifts slightly, reaching into the back pocket of his pants, and draws out a pack of cheap cigarettes. Without waiting for a question or an answer - without asking permission - he withdraws one between careful fingers and slides it between his lips. A flame ignites with a quick click of the lighter, illuminating his face in pale gold, and he feels his body shift, expand, fill with fire and smoke, before he parts his lips again just so and lets it escape upward, into the mouth of the beast where he sits smoldering.

“Speaking of finding time and space for things,” he muses. He lets the cigarette rest between his fingers. “Do you consider yourself reconciled, Doctor Lecter?”

Hannibal blinks, jaw tightening in annoyance he refuses to voice, and sits very still. For a few moments, he allows the smoke to uncurl, to twist and fade in the air between them. He forces himself to keep breathing through his nose despite the offensive smell.

“I have done my best to return to my routines,” he offers, “A near-death experience has a way of opening one’s eyes to things one had once taken for granted.”

He curls his bottom lip between barely-parted teeth and swallows.

“It offers clarity.”

He lets his eyes follow the path of the cigarette to Will’s lips again, concentrates on the end that burns orange before fading, as Will’s breath no longer draws it. He watches the slow exhale, the way it contrasts with the blue smoke from the tobacco itself. Ruined. Used. Gray control.

“A loss of inhibition, of sorts.” the words aren’t clipped, but the gentle banter is gone now, something more systematic, more businesslike in its place as the doctor continues to watch Will. The implication is clear enough.

“I know the feeling,” Will replies. “Although I would - politely - question that trying to return to routine is best. The sensation of something so cataclysmic that it unsettles any foundations you may have laid - why not build something new, rather than restore?”

He traces a thumb across his mouth before replacing it with the cigarette. Smoke curls around his face, coiling upwards in tendrils that caress his lips and cheeks and hair, before exploding upwards as a graceful plume into the serpent’s mouth. Slender fingers play delicately against the fragile paper, balanced precariously over the arm of the leather chair, the ember and its ash growing longer with each moment that passes.

“There are always new options to explore, rather than treading the same old tired paths.” He pauses, thumb braced as though to flick the ash free, but restrained, just so. “Have you considered what new paths may be open to you after your,” a pause, a smile that tastes of burnt sugar, “experience?”

Hannibal’s entire focus is on the ember, the end of the cigarette so close to falling, burning through. He stands slowly, uncurls his body from the chair and straightens before making his way to the corner of the office that houses the small tray with whiskey and glasses.

“I have considered,” he says, and does not elaborate. He takes up a glass, fingers careful against the base so as not to leave marks around the rim.

“And there have been many new paths. However, this session is yours, Will,” he smiles, lips pulled up, tilted, the corners of his eyes just barely lifted. “It is not mine.”

He sets the glass carefully on the table by the chair Will occupies, holds his position behind the man, watches how Will’s shoulders work, tense and relax, before he reaches over and discards the ash into the pristine container provided. Hannibal’s tongue moves gently from his palette, a soft barely-there sound accompanying, before he returns to sit as he had been, allowing himself to settle comfortably. He finds his concentration no longer wavering, now that the safety of his floor is secured.

Unnecessary mess. He knows the smell will linger when Will leaves for the evening. He knows that it will remain despite his best efforts to air the office. He wonders if that’s the point, to remain memorable. To get under his skin.

As if Will Graham was not memorable already.

“I did not anticipate that your oral fixation would manifest itself in such a way,” he says carefully, tone back to the soft conversational lilt it had been before, an underlying hint of something darker there, that Hannibal does not allow through his shell. He can close himself as Will can, he can close himself even from him.

“But as you said, there are so many paths offered after… experiences. Perhaps it should not be so surprising.”

“Thank you.” Will doesn’t bother to hide the ghost of a smile that appears as Hannibal brings him the glass. His fingers wrap around the rim, grey-blue eddies swirling around his hand, and he resists the urge to turn and look at Lecter behind him. A spark of nerves twitches down his spine in relief when he moves back to his seat.

“I wasn’t aware I had one,” Will admits, brows lifting slightly. “I used to make a habit of it when I was in New Orleans. Before I was attacked. After that hospital stay, it seemed like a good opportunity to not pick them up again.”

Will’s tongue brushes his lips, tasting smoke and ash, before he places the cigarette back between them. He leans back, unfurling like a cat, head tipped back and neck arching bare as he sighs upward and watches the smoke disappear, swallowed into the dim light of the office. He perceives, without knowing exactly why, the moment that Hannibal closes himself off - something in the way his hand rests against the chair, or the way he turns his head just perceptibly to the side.

“It goes back to reconciliation,” considers Will. “That maybe those tendencies of which I’ve disavowed myself are worth considering again, from this new vantage point.”

“I remember studying Freud, briefly,” he offers, the tilt of his head mirroring Hannibal’s own, fingers adjusting over his leg in parallel, without realizing that he’s done so. “He believed that individuals with an oral fixation tend towards selfishness - an expectation that others will provide for their basic needs. Comfort. Shelter. Sustenance.” He ashes the cigarette into the glass. “Freud believed that they’re inherently manipulative.”

“Freud has also been criticized,” Hannibal points out, tone amused and expression anything but. “His theories rarely hold up in psychological debate as more than a passing mention. Unfortunately for poor Sigmund, he has become a party trick. But he was not fully incorrect.”

Hannibal shifts, a gentle roll of the neck that he passes for a change in position. His eyes flick down to the movement of Will’s hand.

“Are you selfish, Will?” he asks softly, “Do you seek comfort and shelter and sustenance from others, or do you, instead, provide it?”

He gives a pause, an opening for Will to speak even though the other does nothing more than smile and bring the filter to his lips again, challenging Hannibal to his own answer. The doctor’s jaw tenses. He swallows.

“You are a provider for your dogs,” he continues, “Your… collection of strays. It would seem a selfless act rather than a selfish one. Unless the purpose of the strays was to further your

own view of yourself. Elevate yourself above a species inferior to you."

Hannibal watches Will's lips barely part to allow the smoke to slip through, a gentle exhale. He notes that Will has not broken their eye contact.

"'To his dog, every man is Napoleon,'" Hannibal quotes softly, "'hence the constant popularity of dogs.' In this very act of being selfless, you can become selfish."

A flicker of something behind Will's eyes at mention of his pack, moth wings against a flame, swept away as soon as it appears. "I don't know that any act is completely selfless." He traces a thumb along his mouth, head canting just so, a mirror of Hannibal's posture but for the embers smoldering illicit warmth between his fingers. "Death itself, maybe, by removing one's self from the picture fundamentally."

"It's a fair trade," he continues. "Security in exchange for company. The knowledge that another has your best interests at heart. And by protecting - nurturing - those interests, they avail themselves of a particular nearness to you." His long gaze has yet to leave Hannibal's own, eyes so dark they glint nearly red in the low lights, and he taps the cigarette against the rim of the glass. Without looking, it's precariously close to missing and spilling ash - grey and uncouth - all across the carpet but instead falls just inside, gathers like cloudstack soot in the bottom of the expensive crystal.

"That bond creates a certain intimacy, but it requires absolute trust to give up control over one's well-being to another. They trust me to take care of them, and if it makes me selfish to enjoy their company in doing so," he trails off, rolling a shoulder in a shrug. "Superiority, inferiority - that has nothing to do with it. Watchwords of an ego left unchecked to lord itself over situations outside of its control."

Another crisp caramel smile, singed around the edges. "Am I selfish? Probably," he admits. "But no more than anyone else."

Hannibal's eyes settle on the ash against the glass, the way it balances, seems to cling to nothing. It hadn't escaped his notice, how carelessly Will had set the filter to glass.

He lets the words wash over him, allows the rhythm and flow of them to coax his heart to beating steady once more. Will has always been fascinating to him, curious, a beautiful design to adjust and control. And now he was embracing it, allowing it to overtake him, to filter his words as he had not done previously.

One would think that the voices competing in Will's head for his attention had Hannibal's accent, formed his sentences.

For a moment he feels pride swell.

"Are you manipulative, Will?" he asks him instead, draws the tip of his tongue over his bottom lip enough to taste it, to feel the air cool against it as it dries. "Or no more so than anyone else?"

Will lets the filter slip from his fingers. He doesn't bother to extinguish it and instead lets it fall to smolder against the smooth glass, wondering absently if there's a temperature to be reached that would distemper glass back into sand.

"There's no need to be," he answers with the barest shake of his head. "It's remarkable how much can transpire and others will still be willing to trust you. At least, so long as their own needs are being met."

A tension snares in the corners of his eyes, observing the Cheshire Cat pleasure writ across the face of the man across from him. Will feels suddenly possessed, words that are not his own fluttering from behind his teeth. An ugly invasiveness wraps sharp like mistletoe through the fore of his skull and he clears his throat. Will shifts languidly, drawing the pack and plastic lighter from his back pocket, and leaves them on the table.

Trailing a fingertip around the rim of the glass, around and around the Ouroboros, his tongue grazes briefly along his lower lip. "Is it manipulation to accept and use that trust when it's given? If they offer it to you freely, without being coerced through false pretense? If so, then," he pauses consideringly, a brief smile appearing and fading without ever reaching his eyes. "It sounds like Freud was spot-on."

Hannibal swallows, a brief working of his jaw and throat. In front of him, Will is sitting open, but he is far from vulnerable. Stronger than he has ever been before this. It is a sight to behold, watching your creation allow itself to grow, allow itself free.

A whisper of fabric heralds the shift that sets both of Hannibal's feet to the floor and he leans forward, elbows to knees and hands clasped between in a languid steeple. His fingers point down, unmoving, and the barest hint of the scars Matthew Brown had caused are visible where the sleeves of his shirt have drawn back.

"After a realization comes action." Hannibal murmurs, setting his eyes to Will's but keeping his head ducked, offering him the more dominant position without baring his own throat. If you create a viper you should be sure to teach it not to strike you.

"What would you do with that trust, Will?"

Will draws a quiet breath, but deep, seeming almost larger as he does so, shoulders stretching just perceptibly, occupying the space presented to him without hesitation. His eyes dart to the raised scars, freshly healed.

"I know what I've done with it in the past," Will replies evenly, amusement betrayed by the twitch of his lips, the creases formed in the corners of his eyes. "I feel like I've made good use of it, when the opportunity's been offered to me. Although in particular situations, I admittedly helped to," he tastes the air for the word, "facilitate that relationship."

Will's lower lip catches between his teeth again, and his brows pull together pensively above glacial blue eyes. He slides open the top of the pack and withdraws another cigarette, but he doesn't light it yet, playing with it between his fingertips.

“How did it feel?” His gaze trails to the scars again, head tilting, neck pale. “When he cut you.”

Again the gentle shift in Hannibal’s throat, the barely visible tic that suggests a blink that never comes. He’s poised, wire-taut and patient, letting his eyes linger on the fingers gently turning the filter between them. He considers how the smoke still lingers in the air, knows he’ll smell it for days, wonders if it will seep into the carpet, into his suit…

“Like a reminder.” he said softly, “That a wolf will never be a house pet.”

It had felt premeditated, it had felt organized and cold, cruel in a way that only familiarity could be. And then the man had told him, had confirmed that the scars he wore, the noose around his throat were gifts. From one monster to another.

He remembers panic turning to pride.

He remembers what it felt like not to breathe.

“How did it feel knowing he hadn’t succeeded?”

Will’s jaw tightens, lips pursing into something akin to a smile. “I wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t at least a partial success.”

His thumb flicks an errant tic against the filter of the cigarette, keeping time - focus on the metronome, listen to my voice, breathe deep. Either uninterested or unafraid, Will disregards any reactions he might observe in favor of shifting his attention towards the stacks of books where he used to pace, overlooking the office beneath him.

“It felt like,” the smile widens, briefly, and fades, like flaring embers. “If you want something done right, you should do it yourself.”

Will’s fingers graze his lips as he places the cigarette there, yet unlit, thumb stroking the scruff along his jaw. “The measure of self-improvement is learning from one’s mistakes. Reconciling myself. As you said.” A moment of pleasure transparent in the way his hands relax, the ease in his jaw, as he finds where the tail meets the mouth and begins again.

Hannibal’s smile widens, the corners of his eyes tilt to suggest genuine amusement, a hot, light pride in the man in front of him.

“Yes.” he agrees, drawing his left foot back just enough to lever himself up to stand, to take the two steps necessary to reach Will. The other only lifts his eyes, does not lift his head, and the smile looks almost cruel from this angle. Something in Hannibal twitches, unfurls; a creature of smoke and warmth.

He reaches to retrieve the lighter resting against the glass table, hears the quiet click of his nails against the surface.

“I would also suggest,” he says softly, thumb caressing the cheap metal before flicking the lighter to life, “Taking care that self improvement does not become self destruction.”

For a moment he simply watches the flame, then he rests a hand against the arm of the chair Will occupies, feels the soft fabric of his shirt against the side of his thumb where it brushes by, and places the fire to the tip of the cigarette.

He waits, watches the embers ignite and glow as Will inhales, watches the way Will's lips tighten around the filter a moment before relaxing as he lets the smoke slide smooth between his teeth. Gray control.

Hannibal moves his thumb away. The flame dies. They stand so close Hannibal can smell the adrenaline on Will, the excitement and newness of all this. He can also smell the calm, cool like mint where once Will had burned instead. He takes a deliberate breath, parts his lips to release it.

He waits for Will to bring his hand up to take the cigarette away before straightening up and walking around him again, back to the same alcove from which he'd produced the glass for the ashes. This time he retrieves a round-bellied decanter with a long neck, two more glasses.

Will's smoke betrays his breath, held too long, too deep inside until Hannibal moves away again. There's a blasphemous pleasure in watching the way his perfectly maintained hands - unusually large, unusually strong - move around the brightly colored plastic. The sensation fades lingering into the air like the tendril of smoke curling from the end of the cigarette.

All vice bears with it penitence to be paid - all indulgence comes at a price. His eyes close briefly, unsettled in knowing by innate awareness or movement of air or any number of signs or omens when Hannibal breathes him in. He hopes the smoke might be enough to mask whatever he can taste.

"The obsession with the self," he stops abruptly, tongue halting behind his teeth. "Self-obsession leads to self-destruction. The frustration birthed by failure." Again, a harsh pause accompanied by a gentle tilt of his head. His fingers coil in quiet resistance, and unfurl slowly.

"It only becomes self-destructive when you can't act on your desires," he says steadily, watching Hannibal as he moves, leonid strides in garish plaid. "When whatever it is that you want most isn't something you can have." He pauses, darkly amused. "No matter how hard you try."

Will's lips embrace the filter again, breath illuminated in pale grey as he speaks. "So maybe the answer is to ensure that you can't fail." A pause, lingering, before he remarks passively, as expected by them both. "You don't allow drinking during a session."

"Then consider this a conversation." Hannibal replies, his tone lighter, one he would use at a gala or his dinner parties. Something beneath it, though, grounds their 'conversation', doesn't let it seep away and fade like smoke in the air.

He returns the decanter to where it had stood, takes up the two glasses filled two finger-widths each with the amber liquid.

"A safety net against self destruction."

The only movement Will makes is to bring the cigarette to his lips and inhale. Hannibal watches the way his shoulders have tensed again, sitting up higher since he'd moved away with the lighter. He's nervous in a way an animal is in a new environment, not before a predator. Pity.

Self destruction can just as easily be over confidence. Thinking one knows something unknowable, can predict the unpredictable.

Hannibal moves quietly, enough for Will to hear, but when he stops he is behind him. Just out of the peripheral unless Will turns his head, gives away his discomfort. He watches the tension rise through his neck, sees the muscles stand stark before they shift as Will's arm moves to flick ash into the glass already on the table.

His jaw works. He swallows.

Hannibal allows a gentle smile before moving to set the glass down just as Will's hand moves back. A dance. Intricate. Not touching there, but the *promise*…

He moves around behind Will to get to his seat again, lets his hand pass just above the back of the comfortable leather chair to skim his fingers against the hair still short, sharp from the cut, at Will's neck.

He sets his glass down before sitting down himself.

"Do you still have nightmares, Will?" he asks.

The instant their skin makes contact is no more than a breath, a breeze, a blink, but in that moment Will moves almost preternaturally, pressing the cigarette between parted lips and tilting his head back just so.

Almost as if he were leaning into the touch.

Almost as if he knew it was coming.

A cloud of smoke follows in Lecter's wake as he passes by and Will reaches for his drink, lifting it in thanks. "To self-improvement, instead."

He's grateful for the little distractions with which to occupy his uneasy hands, tapping silently against the glass, caressing the smoldering cigarette. He draws a breath as he sips the scotch, smelling as well as tasting, and leans forward with the glass between his hands, elbows on his knees and fingers steepled together.

Will snorts a soft note of amusement at the question. "Dream analysis? Now we really are getting into Freudian party tricks." He licks the taste of earth and peat and fire from his lips - it is a very exceptional scotch - and swirls the amber liquid in the glass, watching the patterns that play broken across the surface. "Yes," he says finally. "But I don't wake up the way I used to. I don't wake up afraid of what I've seen."

He stands, shoulders rolling as he stretches his neck, baring it, uncoiling from the seat that makes him a patient rather than a visitor. Collaborator. Friend? No - not that. Will's hunched

slouch is gone, eased back into a deliberate attention to each movement and breath he takes. It's nowhere near the inhuman control that Hannibal has of himself, but something newer, younger, more fierce for its own unsteady exploration of its own nature.

"I dream about Abigail, still. Beverly. You." A pause, an inscrutable and practiced absence of tone in his voice. "But you know all about those." Precariously, Will carries his cigarette with him, letting it rest between his fingers as he trails them along a bookshelf. "What do you dream of, Doctor Lecter? Do you dream?"

Hannibal follows the path Will makes with his eyes and doesn't move to get up again, not yet.

He knows of the dreams Will has of him only from what Will has told him. That he imagines killing Hannibal, that he imagines using his hands. A reckoning, meant just for him. He wonders, often, what that entails. What it means to Will to destroy with his hands. How intimate he sees it being.

"I dream." He replies at length, a truth for a truth, quid pro quo.

"Dreams are memories," he murmurs, shifting his eyes from Will to the drink in front of him, holding his hands still to allow the surface to settle. He waits for Will to walk far enough to reflect there. "Among other things. What a resting mind sees shows a much greater insight to a person, than what their waking eyes perceive. We are unable to control what our unconscious mind sees. Sometimes it's for the best that dreams are unknown to any but ourselves."

Hannibal brings the glass to his lips and savors the small sip, feels it warm his mouth before he swallows, allows the warmth to spread.

"What do you want to get from our sessions together, Will?" he asks finally, cradling his drink, barely turning his head to direct his voice to his wandering companion. He refuses to see how close the cigarette is to his books.

Will's perfectly aware of how deliberately he's being not-watched, and it stirs in him a delight that - along with the bravery of liquor - loosens his limbs as he works a languid circulation of the room. No longer the pacing animal fearfully patrolling an unfamiliar territory - closer perhaps to laying claim to one, in the way that he possesses his whole space, and even beyond himself to the shelves and their books and all the room marked by his fingers and his fire.

"Clarity," he offers, reclining back against Lecter's desk, glass in one hand and cigarette in the other, both palms resting on the flawless dark mahogany. Antique, no doubt - probably belonged to someone important. Wood all burns the same, though, when you really get down to it. He doesn't insinuate his thoughts in any physical way, though, beyond the unassuming nearness of the glowing copper embers held in his hand to the edge of the desk he's leaned against.

He takes another sip, drinking down the burn all at once, tongue tracing the remnants from his lips. "An expert's insight into the nature and nurture that shaped me into who I am. Who I

can be.”

His eyes light on Hannibal’s, knowing he’s watching now that Will’s there, in his space, at his desk, as though it were his own. “What do you get from our sessions, Doctor?”

Hannibal’s lips twitch, the barest hint of a smile, before he parts them with the tip of his tongue. What does he get?

“Company.” he tells him honestly, the word soft, tasting of far richer things than initial suggestion. He settles his eyes on the hand Will has curled around the table, cigarette between his fingers, the ash dangerously close to falling to the floor.

He knows Will would allow it, would watch it fall, would carelessly bring the filter to his lips again and just look.

Something about that blatant disregard, disrespect, of Hannibal’s space, spurs him to move. He stands again, takes his glass with him as he approaches the man perched against his desk. What does he want to get?

“The privilege of seeing you develop into who you are,” he adds, voice softer still, steps measured to every two beats of his heart until he’s standing nearly toe to toe with Will, watching him. “Of having a hand in developing the nature within you that you stifle and poison.”

He transfers the glass to his left hand, holds it close to his chest as he stands. He’s taller than Will, usually, he’s more so here. Will does not look away.

“I want to not see you withdraw when you set it free.”

Will’s eyes narrow, a very slight movement, something both suspicious and amused. In his peripheral vision, Hannibal sees him gently flick the end of his cigarette, can imagine the ash hitting the ground, splitting to something weightless and silver on the dark wood floor.

It’s a claim, blatant and challenging, it’s an invitation.

Hannibal blinks. Watches Will mirror the motion, unconsciously perhaps, and at the vulnerability leans in to press his lips to Will’s in a harsh claim of his own, free hand against the spot he had caressed just moments before.

A soft sound flutters from between their mouths - almost a laugh - from Will as he leans back, bracing himself on the desk with the hand still clinging to the glass of scotch. Arching upward, tongue brazenly tasting the warm liquor that flavors the hard mouth pressed against his own, Will nearly reclines back across the desk, as though it were a bed rather than unyielding hardwood. As though it were his bed, to which he invited Hannibal.

He sets the glass aside and lets his hand trace a line down Lecter’s arm, soft fabric over remorseless muscle, laying back until he’s nearly supine beneath him to let Hannibal think to claim him as opposed to simply being claimed. Will’s pride is like a wild thing refusing to be swallowed by the Leviathan and his limbs press all at once around Hannibal, leg sliding up

against his thigh, fingers fiercely snaring the plaid sleeve of his coat to drag himself upward, his entire body bent like a reed in the wind that's swept over it.

And when they finally break enough to breathe, light eyes meeting dark, Will is certain that the evening was his to win all along, a triumphantly pleased blush rising bright over his cheeks. His pleasure is genuine enough that it almost seems accidental that in his surprise, Will would let the smoldering cigarette fall from his fingers to the floor, leaving an unerasable mark scorched in ash.

Almost, until he makes no move to pick it up again.

Hannibal watches, he notices, he remembers. He keeps his eyes on Will as the other studies him, watches the very subtle movement of his eyes as they focus on one of Hannibal's then the other, back and forth. Beneath the stifling, acrid smell of tobacco, Will smells like lust and nerves.

He swallows, just once, a deliberate movement in his throat, and leans around Will, presses closer to him, to set his glass down on one of the journals on his desk. When he pulls back, his eyes are down, watching the pulse throb in Will's throat, imagining how it would taste against his tongue.

"Selfish indeed," he says softly, watching how his words draw Will's pupils wider by just a fraction. Agreement. An answer without words.

For a moment he remembers the last time he answered that way, what his answer had been.

"Manipulative." he draws a hand up Will's arm to set the backs of his knuckles soft just under his jaw, feeling the fluttering heart beat, the heat of his skin. He moves his hand higher still, eyes following, and presses Will's bottom lip gently out of shape with his thumb.

He allows a smile wondering how far the oral fixation goes.

"What's to be done about that?"

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

“I want your mouth,” Hannibal says softly, “Until you learn to retract your teeth before you bite.”

Will can’t react fast enough not to react to this, a sudden jerk of his wrist that merits a tightening of fingers again.

“That requires a very specific kind of trust, doesn’t it,” he breathes through his teeth.

Chapter Notes

Welp. Now it's gonna be three chapters.

A deep breath catches to steady his pulse and Will wonders if Hannibal can hear his heart shuddering faster, smell the adrenaline cascading like cold water from his scalp down his spine and into his fingers. He stares like frostbite, pale blue swallowed by the blackness of his pupils, and remains absolutely still, caught somewhere between fight or flight.

Will allows the invasive touch, clinically cold across his mouth, against his teeth, for only a moment before he jerks his head away. A tension flickers tight through his thigh when he presses it harder against Hannibal’s hip, the barest twitch of muscle to guide Hannibal as Will wants him, not the other way around.

“It’s ingrained, isn’t it? Something in our formation, how all our pieces are put together. I’m not sure a psychiatrist of even your caliber can undo that,” considers Will.

Both palms press against the desk as he leans back, crumpling papers carelessly beneath, defiance rather than submission in the tilt of his chin as the cigarette smolders bitter smoke against the polished floor.

“Must have slipped,” Will finally notes, eyes darting towards the thin trail of smoke. “My apologies.” A smile like butter wouldn’t melt in his mouth accompanies soft-spoken words and he swallows, just once, making no move to pick it up.

Hannibal goes, shifts as Will aims to move him. He rests his hands on either side of Will, fingers curled, but they would touch the backs of his wrists were he to unfurl them.

His eyes don't even move to the smoldering filter. He'd suppressed his anger at the blatant rudeness, at the challenge there as well. It's almost poignant, how much Will feels he's gained, how one shift, small give on the leash Hannibal is still holding wrapped around his knuckles, and Will feels the need to bite.

He's never approved of muzzles.

But he can always tighten the choke.

He hums, the only answer he gives for the moment, as Will sits poised and deceptively open on his desk. He leans in again, runs the tip of his nose lightly along the curve of Will's jaw, down to his throat, parts his lips to bite just barely against the collar of his shirt.

The tug is unexpected, deliberate and jarring, and he catches Will's wrist as it comes up to balance himself, turning it just enough to upset Will off the table before he steps back and lets gravity take Will to the floor. His knee lands, predictably, right beside the filter.

"It would have been polite to put it out." he observes, still holding Will pinned by his shock and the pain in his arm.

Will's eyes scarcely had time to close, a shiver trickling through him beneath Hannibal's mouth, before they open again wide with surprise. He hisses through his teeth as his wrist is turned, the base of his thumb caught neatly in Hannibal's easy grasp, and there's not enough time to resist before his knees smack hard against the floor.

He bites back a curse, eyes flashing as he looks up at Lecter. Will wets his lips with a brief flicker of tongue and then lowers his eyes again in something like obedience as he reaches for the cigarette butt.

The back of his hand is turned nearly to rest against his shoulder and he feels the strain of bones twisting in his wrist and his elbow, sharp stabbing pain that would break if turned further or fought against. It would require no more effort from the doctor than holding his hand in place and Will not following its movement.

A flinch tightens Will's jaw as he grasps the filter between the fingers of his free hand and hesitates, a moment of deliberation, eyes lowered, breath coming faster now.

He turns it over in his fingers, anger flaring under the smug domination he feels pressing down on him, the sharp sensation of fingernails against his hand. Holding his breath against tension and pain, Will crushes it out against the top of Hannibal's perfectly shined shoe.

"Better?"

It's almost involuntary, and Hannibal should check the motion, but the brief curl of his lip draws his face into a snarl for a bare moment before he settles himself back to calm. Will is clever but he's petulant, new to this and excited by the prospects.

Reckless.

“Overconfidence leads to self destruction, Will,” he reminds him softly, drawing his thumb in a soft gesture, intimate against the inside of Will’s wrist where nails had bitten just moments before.

“Be smart.”

Hannibal’s heart beat has remained steady, still a careful beat smooth through his veins, but now it feels heavier, like a thick pounding against his chest and in his throat. So very often a hunter, yet so infrequently a teacher in this way.

He bends enough to brush his lips against Will’s wrist, thumb moving to press against his palm to hold him still, just as prone. He will allow retaliation, will watch Will struggle himself to understanding, bend to conditioning. But outright rudeness he will not tolerate again.

Will’s features tighten into a grimace of pain, teeth clenched, as Hannibal leans into him - even the slightest movement turning his joints against themselves. The soft danger of Hannibal’s mouth is a stark contrast to the twist in Will’s arm and it sets off sparks behind Will’s eyes, forcing them briefly closed.

He knows he’s better - has been, can be, will be - but he’s playing against an expert and a held breath escapes in a huff past his lips, frustration gathering coiled in his belly. Will forces it down, lets it wrap in on itself, and doesn’t fight against the thin affection or the brutal pressure.

But the key to winning isn’t always brute force, especially when he’s admittedly outmatched in that respect. *Company*, Will remembers, and leans in, rather than away. It means a slight tightening of pressure - old wounds in his shoulder reawakening like matches flaring to life - but he slides his free hand in a hesitant line up Hannibal’s calf. It’s a pleasing sight, hair tousled from the sudden jerk to the floor, a posture of subservience, submissiveness at Hannibal’s feet. Will presses his cheek just softly to the inside of his thigh, mouth soft against the expensive plaid fabric, sighing warmth.

“Better?” he asks again.

Another hum and Hannibal allows a smile, the one that doesn’t touch his lips but instead darkens his eyes, the corners tilting up. He doesn’t ease his hold on Will’s arm, though he isn’t exerting more pressure than it takes to quite literally hold it up - Will would do himself the damage and Hannibal would remain blameless if he broke himself against him like a rock.

He brings his free hand down to splay his fingers in the warm curls, bend just gently to run the tips of his nails over Will’s scalp, a pleasurable motion, one Will shifts into perhaps without knowing he does. Hannibal flexes his fingers again.

“Better,” he confirms, voice like silk, heavy and smooth, cool until it touches skin. He slides his palm gently from Will’s hair to his cheek, lower still to curl just the tips of his fingers

under his jaw.

“Eyes up.”

The coiled sensation in his belly roils suddenly, unexpectedly at the instruction and Will’s cheeks burn smoldering warmth beneath Hannibal’s fingers. His eyes are dark beneath his hair as he looks upwards, gaze briefly darting to the hand still holding his wrist in place, before following the long lines of Hannibal’s body upward. It’s not just strength - it’s power he sees - and a tension flickers in his jaw as their eyes finally meet.

Will slides his hand higher, grasping the back of leg now, above his knee. His fingers are numb in the hand that’s turned in on itself, elbow still sharp and shoulder starting to burn from the sustained pressure. A soft sigh, shuddering release as Will reminds himself to breathe, watching Hannibal above him not with affection but with the wariness of two predators crossing paths - disputed territory up for grabs between them.

He allows another brush of lips against the coarse fabric, studying the reaction it does or doesn’t draw. “What do you *want*?” he asks, a rough whisper against the inside of Hannibal’s thigh. “From our sessions.” An errant addition, tinged with bitter amusement.

At this, Hannibal allows a genuine smile. It softens the lines on his face, softens his gaze. And juxtaposed with his stance with the way he holds Will at his mercy, is truly terrifying.

“I want you to let me be your gauge.” he says, “Like you once did.”

He adjusts the position of Will’s arm just enough, just for him to sigh out another sound, less pained, in quiet gratitude. He does not let him go.

“I want you to understand the power in submission, add it to the repertoire of your manipulation. Hone it sharp.”

Hannibal curls his lip into his mouth, just over his bottom teeth, but doesn’t bite down.

“I want your mouth,” he adds softly, “Until you learn to retract your teeth before you bite.”

Will can’t react fast enough not to react to this, a sudden jerk of his wrist that merits a tightening of fingers again.

“That requires a very specific kind of trust, doesn’t it,” he breathes through his teeth.

Shadows gather in Will’s features as he deliberately drops his gaze. His fingers stretch numbly in Hannibal’s grasp as he considers his situation - admittedly precarious - and he chews his lip. It’s a familiar nervous gesture, one he thought was gone and forces himself to stop as soon as he realizes he’s done it, and well after Hannibal notices it.

His instinct is to balk, to shy away, to duck his head and withdraw. Like prey. Another quick tense of his jaw comes and goes before he slides his free hand from the back of Lecter’s thigh to the front, fingers marking a slow path up the crossed lines of plaid in front of him.

“I thought we were supposed to be correcting the fixation,” he observes, his words singed at the edges. “More unorthodox therapies, doctor?”

“You don’t respond to anything conventional, Will,” Hannibal tells him, reminds, with a gentle curl of his tone. “You know all the tricks, how it works. I need to catch you off guard to have that mind of yours stop for me, turn how I want it.”

He caresses Will’s cheek again, an intimate gesture that he knows will have the younger man bristling.

“You can’t correct a fixation, Will,” he adds softly, pulling the man just subtly closer, not tugging so much as coaxing him to kneel properly, not slouch - the control is familiar and intoxicating. Especially over someone like Will Graham. “You can simply… adjust its uses and impacts.”

Will wants to pull back from the touch, to retreat from the overt tenderness of it, to jerk his head away from the affection laid on him in the gentle brush of fingers but rather than doing so, he accepts it. Leans into it, even, a subtle turn of his head to allow it to linger a moment more, tracing a thoughtful line over the soft scruffy hair and warm flush of his cheek.

He tells himself he means it as deception, a subtle strategy of the game.

Will tells himself a lot of things that he’s not sure he means anymore.

The moment of doubt is enough that he follows the turn of his wrist, fractional though Hannibal’s fingers move. Will leans forward off the desk that was pressed to his back and moves to his knees, feet tucked neatly beneath him. He tries to force himself to look upwards in defiance but can’t. It’s sweet like burnt sugar on Will’s tongue, the pleasure he knows Hannibal feels in controlling him, like the warmth of fine scotch simmering hot through his stomach. His expression is closed, giving nothing, showing nothing, his fingers still against Hannibal’s thigh.

“How would you adjust me, then,” he asks, a statement more than a question. He’s shuttering fast, pulling himself out of the moment, away from Hannibal’s prideful pleasure in humiliating him, escaping into himself.

The one place that Hannibal has never fully breached.

Will tells himself a lot of things that he’s not sure he means anymore.

“I would have you here.” Hannibal responds, no hesitation. He watches Will close himself away, watches as the pendulum swings behind his eyes and Will is no longer here.

He’s seen him do this before, has seen the way Will had sat in court with his eyes glassy and his expression clear. It would be frightening if it wasn’t so fascinating - Hannibal has always wanted to know where Will goes, how far his mind runs that is a clear path from the killing, from the fear, from him.

He allows the languid blink before twisting Will's hand just enough, to watch the life return to Will's eyes with the quiet curse that slips from his lips.

"I would have you embrace your moments and not escape them. What is so fearsome about this?" he tilts his head, eyes on Will's as he continues to hold him in a position that grows steadily more painful, watches Will's expression war with staying clear, neutral, at most angry… and watches how he falls fast to pain.

"You do not fear me, Will, you fear that when I let your arm go, you will not stand up. You fear that once I return your autonomy, you will use it to push closer."

Demonstratively, Hannibal loosens his hold, until Will can twist his wrist free and massage the circulation and feeling back into his arm. He doesn't step back.

"Stay in the moment, Will, stay with me."

The relief is exquisite and yanks him back like a ripcord, not the slow pull of pain but intense and sudden. Will gasps as his joints slide back to their rightful places and he slumps back on his heels, rubbing his wrist with his thumb. Release floods through his limbs and he hides the spark of nerves that cause him to tremble just perceptibly by running his hand along his arm instead, to work sensation back into it.

It's only then that he realizes he's exactly where he was before. He hasn't stood or drawn away, hasn't fled as though hunted, knees still pressed to the floor at Hannibal's feet. A faint smile flickers to life and then dies just as suddenly.

"I'm here," he finally says. "With you."

The twisting pain, the snarl of relief seems to center him again, not distant but pensive. He wraps his sweater sleeve over his fingers and wipes at the mark on Hannibal's shoe. The burn is there, damage done, but the ash he's able to wipe away. Not an apology, but an awareness.

He stretches his hands along the front of Hannibal's pants, palms skimming soft over his shins, against his thighs, and his fingers hook beneath his coat in his waistband. Will leans forward again - as he's just been taught - onto his knees, and nuzzles nearly worshipful against the zipper of his trousers. His eyes, glistening pale blue like ice, lift upwards to meet Hannibal's own. Just as guided. Just as instructed.

"Self-improvement," he considers. "The ability to learn from one's mistakes."

Or the ability to turn them to advantages, Hannibal thinks. He settles his hand in Will's hair again, draws the errant curls from his forehead with a sweep of his thumb before bringing his free hand down to brush over the backs of Will's fingers, splay his larger hand over Will's, feeling the thin sensitive skin, the muscles hard beneath.

Fragile. Angry. *Fledgeling.*

He knows Will is so much more than this, he can feel the potential pump through his veins like blood.

"You do not hate me" Hannibal notes softly, tilting his head in consideration, lets his eyes take in Will beneath him. "You play at hate as you understand fear. Fear is a paralytic, it stills the body, the mind, but not yours. And hate... hate is active, is craves motion, hungers for release."

He slides his hand over Will's head, the curls catching between his fingers until he grasps at the back of his head and tilts it back, watches Will's throat work in irritation, watches the way his pupils widen at the use of the words.

Verbal conditioning, the soft imposition of words against a mind that absorbs them; craves. Hungers. Release.

Will does not respond to violence, to anger. It means little to him, he sees too much of it. Anything you see frequently loses its meaning, its significance.

"When you imagine killing me, what do you feel?" he asks, voice just above a whisper, as curious as he is adamant he knows the answer. Hate is active, aches for completion.

Just as desire does.

Will flinches, at the way Hannibal's fingers snare his hair and the way his words snare in his mind - like fishhooks, like teeth, trying to tear away at him. An unconscious reaction, like the way his fingers twitch tighter in Hannibal's waistband.

"I fear," he responds softly, "I fear how much I hate." He swallows roughly, shifting his weight on his knees to try and ease the tight grasp Hannibal holds in his hair. Betraying him, a flush of color to his cheeks, a widening of pupils. Arousal in his quickening pulse, or something very near it.

He lets himself imagine it, like countless times before, and a smile catches in the corner of his mouth. "It feels like relief. When you go rigid underneath me. When your sigh passes beneath my fingers. And your mouth falls open and your pulse slows to nothing," his voice is faint, urgent as he cranes his neck against the grip. "I feel like I can breathe again."

"I feel," Will wets his lips, searching for the right word. "Sated."

"Yes." it's a sigh, relief, a strange and mutual understanding, as though those words are all Hannibal needs before he pulls Will further back and kisses him again - just as harsh, just as brutal as before. But this time he lets him fight, allows the struggle, steps back enough to curve his back and adjust the awkward position, hands on either side of Will's face to hold him.

He doesn't need Will demeaned on the floor, he doesn't want him broken and leashed, doesn't want him tamed, he wants Will to understand what he is, embrace it. He wants to taste the poison Will's words brought to his lips.

He doesn't attempt to pull Will up again, instead sinks to the floor, breaking the kiss but holding Will close enough to feel his panting exhales against his lips, to press their foreheads together, to feel Will's jaw work under his palm in anger or hunger or need.

A growl of protest escapes Will but he kisses fiercely back against Hannibal despite it, lips dry like smoke, tongue still hot with scotch as it darts to taste Hannibal's lips against his own. He braces his palms against the floor, fingers curling as Hannibal leans over him, every muscle coiled tight.

"Overconfidence," he sighs shakily, pleased by the indecisiveness he sees, before he wraps his fist in Hannibal's jacket and pulls him in again. His teeth graze Hannibal's lower lip, catching it, tugging against him before he pushes suddenly forward.

He won't be beneath him, not again, and Will leans into Hannibal entirely, a ravenous hunger in the snarling kiss that joins their mouths, until Hannibal is beneath him. Will slides over him easily, wrapping his thighs over Hannibal's hips to straddle his lap.

Brushing his knuckles along Hannibal's pulse, Will smiles faintly against Hannibal's ear. "I used to dream about choking you," he whispers, long lashes brushing Hannibal's cheek as Will's eyes drift closed. "Squeezing harder and harder until I feel your trachea crumble beneath my hands, soft and frail. Listening to you struggle to draw air - a wet, sickly sound." His fingers unfurl to rest against Hannibal's throat and his breath catches at the sight, cheeks ruddy with excitement and hips rolling hard against the older man.

His hand lingers only for an instant before he slides his fingers along Hannibal's jaw, over his carved cheekbones, fingertips touching soft along the thin bones beneath his eye, and finally tracing the bridge of his nose up into his hair. Will smells of immolation as he murmurs into Hannibal's ear, hips grinding possessively against him.

"Now I dream that I'm using my fists."

Hannibal exhales, slowly, for the moment allows the touch, the motion above him. He doesn't tilt his head to bare his throat to Will, doesn't do more than set his hands on either side of Will's hips and hold him there; feels the tension run through him, so different from the helpless trembling of before.

It's quite something to watch Will slip into a new skin.

And here there had been no pendulum, had been nothing to indicate a change - an entirely flawless movement.

He trails his hand up Will's spine, nails down to make him feel it, one after the other, just along the vertebrae. He watches Will arch to it, bend into the pleasant sensation, listens to the way his breath hitches, the way his heart beats quicker, with them so close.

"Both so intimate." he notes softly.

Will shivers sharply, drawing a breath through his teeth and arching rigid into the scrape of nails. He's nearly coy as he grasps his shirt and sweater in his hands and tugs them off over his head - not Hannibal's choice, his choice, he tells himself - and leans in again to replace his fingers in Hannibal's hair, tightening them just a little - just enough.

“I want to feel it,” he whispers roughly, his free hand working the buttons free of Hannibal’s coat, his waistcoat, so many goddamn infuriating buttons that Will nearly threatens to rip them loose. “I want to feel every second of it.”

“My hands hurt when I wake up,” he whispers against Hannibal’s cheek, deceptively gentle kisses punctuating his words. “It’s so vivid. Blood. Bone. The weight of my entire body crashing down. I used to be afraid of those dreams.” His teeth graze Hannibal’s jaw, and press again against his throat, not biting but claiming. He shoves Hannibal’s coat onto the floor, fingers still twisted into his hair.

“I’m not anymore.”

No, there is no fear in Will now. There is energy and anger and light, and Hannibal listens to his words, feels them against his skin as surely as he feels Will’s fingers tug and pull and seek to undo him. He allows a smile.

Will isn’t here anymore.

Not the Will that had come into his office on time, at exactly 7:30pm.

No, this is the Will who knew how every killer had conducted his symphony. This is the Will that had wanted to kill a man in cold blood to satisfy his craving for a reckoning.

And to this Will, Hannibal bares his throat.

A sensation like thorns sharpens along Will’s back as he curves over Hannibal, and he imagines the taste of blood in his mouth, glistening dark between his teeth, as he bites down harder. His tongue traces a line along the vessels that pulse calmly, so effortlessly relaxed, a resting tempo that draws a silent snarl from Will, fury flaring like sparks.

His fingers curl against Hannibal’s shoulder, the other still fisted in his once-neat hair, and he pushes him roughly to the floor. Fully astride him, a deep bend gathers and releases in a languid curl through his back, hips bucking as he rubs himself harder now, though not faster.

He wants to feel it - every second of it. And for a moment Will considers the exact movement - the precise jerk of his head - that would allow him to rip out Hannibal’s throat with his bare teeth. But the trembling tension in his jaw eases, replaced with his lips instead - the unsuspecting cage to the sharper, darker things inside him. Will presses damp, lingering kisses to the bruise he’s left behind, fingers grazing Hannibal’s neck as they slide from his hair to the top of his shirt, working the buttons free until he can slide his hand beneath it. Tender fingertips and sharp nails tangle in the soft hair before raking roughly over a nipple, leaving red marks in their wake.

Hannibal hisses, tips his head back and draws lips up over gritted teeth. Above him, Will is fulfilling every prediction, losing himself to his own monster for just a few moments, for just long enough.

Hannibal brings his hands to cup over Will’s shoulders, to press him closer. He will allow Will’s violence, allow his anger to manifest itself into physical marks and deep possession,

but he will not show him the same. He will not draw marks on Will's skin, nor leave bruises to remember.

His power will be in having Will sleepless from the memory of sensation, from remembering the taste of Hannibal's heartbeat at his throat. His reward will be seeing Will at a time not set for their appointment, just as precisely early, just as determined to please.

Hannibal insinuates one hand into Will's hair again, not a harsh grip but enough to adjust him, to shift him, tilt his own head and kiss him again as his other slides down Will's side, soft fingers the opposite to Will's harsh claiming against his chest. He doesn't fumble with the zipper. The button comes free, and then he has Will in hand through soft cheap fabric and allows the younger man to pull back and pant against his lips.

"Fuck." A thin whisper escapes between their mouths, eyes closing despite himself at the touch. Only when he's grasped in Hannibal's broad, warm hand does he realize how painfully hard he's become, pale cheeks burning ruddy bright, curls of hair clinging dark with sweat against his skin. His hand stretches to brace against Hannibal's chest and as his lips part to catch his breath he suddenly shivers - exposed, open, unexpectedly himself despite himself.

Will's gaze darts between Hannibal's eyes, searching for something that might be there, might have been once, or may have never been. The last thought draws a shudder and he pushes to sit upwards, straddling Hannibal's stomach. Will reaches behind, to undo Hannibal's trousers and slide beneath the waistband of his underwear, fingernails scraping gently through the coarse hair, and watches as his other hand wraps itself in Hannibal's tie, loosely at first, but gathering tighter.

He holds Hannibal's gaze and hesitates, perfectly divided into halves, balanced on knife's edge.

Hannibal exhales, still no sound beyond the gentle click in his throat as he swallows. He blinks, leaves his eyes half closed in pleasure - of Will's hands against him, of Will's entire being changing just for this. He endures the pressure against his throat, arches his back enough to suggest he feels it but refuses to move, a soft challenge.

He keeps the slow building rhythm of his hand against the fabric, infuriatingly not moving to touch Will skin to skin, as his other moves over Will's front. He bends his knuckles to skim them down the center of Will's chest as his nails had scraped lightly over his back.

"Not afraid and not angry," he muses softly, voice catching on a quiet groan as Will's fingers tighten and twist - Hannibal doesn't miss the way his eyes widen, his lips tilt just a little at the victory - "What are you now, Will?"

Will's eyes flutter closed at the friction and he draws a sharp breath through his nose, letting it fill him, letting it feed the fire rather than trying to find something to smother it out. The tie is held firmly - muscles straining in his forearm - as tight as it can be without moving Hannibal with it. Somewhere at the back of his neck a seam pops and a little breath that could be a laugh escapes past Will's lips.

"Aware," comes the reply, past the closed cage of his teeth. The sharp nerves in his back crackle to life but he doesn't let them overwhelm him, doesn't let the thorns pierce skin.

Gray control in his singed smile, in the careful push and pull of muscles, tendons, impulses, desires. The hand not holding the tie dives skillfully beneath the soft silk to grasp Hannibal's cock. Skilled strong fingers aching to provide release.

Will could snuff him out here, he considers, bide his time until his clawed grasp is already tight against Hannibal's infuriatingly slow pulse, to make it speed out of his control until it stops. He settles instead, for now, for the pulse already in his grasp, fist moving in long, languid pulls from base to tip, thumb swiping over the dampness he feels with a flutter of pleasure.

He leans low over Hannibal at the same time as he jerks the tie sharply upwards, bringing his mouth to the underside of Hannibal's jaw. Will catches his skin and sucks gently, tongue tasting any trace of sweat, building slowly, sucking harder until he feels the tender skin growing warm beneath his mouth. He's not above leaving physical traces of their cruel joining. Especially there - just there, above his collar.

A gift for Dr. Bloom, perhaps.

And this groan he feels more than hears.

Hannibal’s hand tightens in Will’s hair but doesn’t push him away, for a moment they stay still, caught together, and then Hannibal’s hands are down Will’s back, both, and grasping his hips enough to unbalance him, press him closer.

Will’s lips part from his skin with a gasp, his hand dislodged and pressed to the floor for balance. Hannibal knows it will leave a mark, knows that he will kneel to clean it later, this evening or another it hardly matters now. He thinks that he will remember that one more clearly than the one Will’s cigarette had burned into the floor on the other side of them.

He doesn’t let Will grasp for control again, he hoists him up just enough to slide his palms over Will’s ass and push his pants lower. Not bared, but easier access when he brings his hand between them again and takes both himself and Will against his palm to stroke, quick, sharp, deliberate.

Will’s breath catches in a quiet gasp, rocking backwards from him to watch. His hair hides his eyes - long since dishevelled from its 7:30PM tidiness - but the curve of his lips, mouth fallen open to pant breathless says enough. Seeing them both laid bare against each other, feeling the unfamiliar skin sliding against his own, Will shudders and a moan - a single note - falls from his mouth.

He runs a hand along Hannibal’s arm, feeling the muscles working beneath his skin and tracing them down into the bones of his hand and letting it rest there. Another sharp breath, fingers trailing over the warm slickness he feels at the tips, and he tilts his head back, lets it roll against his shoulders. He doesn’t need to watch to see. He doesn’t need to see to know.

“You’ve thought of this before,” Will notes. A smile catches curiously in the corner of his mouth. “And you touched yourself when you thought of it.”

Another long exhale, a parting of lips with a pink tip of the tongue. He has imagined many things. Has imagined Will allowing his nature forth, imagined opening the door to him covered in blood and trembling, no longer afraid but not yet sure what to do with the energy that pulls at him. He has imagined Will beneath him, above him, mouth slack with pleasure, hair tousled and soft.

He has never imagined Will quite like this, his fantasies only skimming the surface of Will Graham, caressing him, but never quite pulling aside the curtain to fully see.

This is better. This is real, Will heavy and pleased on top of him, coy and scheming and open.

He twists his wrist and gasps at the sensation, feels Will release another gentle moan. They’re both close, the words from before coiling around them as the smoke had done, seeping into their skin, their minds, and bringing all that anticipation to a head.

He presses the flat of his thumb against the slit of Will’s cock and feels him shudder, splays his free hand between Will’s shoulders and holds him still, to feel every twitch and shiver his body can’t control, pushes himself up far enough to have Will’s pleasure whispered against his ear.

Intimate.

You do not have to be pinned, he thinks, prone, to be possessed, Will.

He kisses Will’s victory from his lips with a smile.

Will knows. He knows, though he lies and he pretends and he buries it deep, as his fingers trace tenderness along Hannibal’s jaw and his mouth moves in response, he knows. This is the moment that he won’t be able to shake. This kiss that will wake him in a cold fury days, weeks, months, years later when it resurfaces, again and again.

The moment when he sat astride the Leviathan, and allowed his triumph to be taken.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

> *Neck bared, chest open, a banquet laid bare and fearless before him. Will trusts that Hannibal won't tear through him yet, bones shredding sharp through soft tissue to snare and rip Will's heart from its moorings.*
>
> *Will knows that his trust isn't a guarantee that he won't.*

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

But if Will's going to break - bend and give and snap - he wants to feel it, every second of it. He wants to break beautifully because if he's going to be haunted, as he knows he will - inside, deep inside - then he wants to at least feel it now. What good are scars if you don't remember the wounds that caused them?

Will arcs his back, chest and belly and cock pressing into Hannibal, and he slides his arms over his shoulders, around his neck, pulling them so tightly together that no air or light or goodness can pass between. Will gasps against Hannibal's mouth and presses insistently into his tightened fist, before drawing his lips away to graze damp against his cheek instead. He places kisses, a gesture that feels nearly tender, against his nose, his cheek, his brow, his jaw, eyes closed. And he imagines using his fists instead, drawing gore rather than warmth in his wake.

"Tell me," he asks, smoky sweet against Hannibal's ear. "I know you dream about me. But I want to hear you say it." He leans back, arms tightening to tug Hannibal's mouth against his shoulder, his collarbone, spine curving deep over Hannibal's legs. "What parts of me do you taste?"

Everything.

Hannibal refrains from playing into the hand, from filling Will's mind with the answers he seeks, but it's an honesty he thinks he can allow himself.

"I have imagined you in every way," he breathes, draws his teeth over the skin willingly offered, the skin presented and warm beneath him, "You were fire, once, I could taste it in the air around you, your mind burned."

He hums, draws his hand up the center of Will's back again, soft, nails just a brief reminder, to feel Will bend that beautiful way again.

“I would honor you,” he says softly, eyes down at the pulse thumping in Will’s throat before he ducks his head to kiss lower, over to the organ that beats thick and quick there, “I would eat your heart.”

A pleased noise parts Will’s lips as he arches back into the long fingers splayed over his spine, laid open before Hannibal as though his ribs would split wide through his skin in sacrifice. He draws a breath as he watches Hannibal held at bay by only an inch of bone and skin, the thin cage behind which his heart flutters like a songbird trapped.

“Intimate,” Will echoes, sliding a leg against his side, to wrap around him. He laces his fingers through Hannibal’s hair, curling them to keep him close, to keep Hannibal’s mouth over his heart. To let him smell the blood pulsing fresh and full of life through him. To let him taste how very near it is. He could have it, if he wanted, if he ripped through that weak wall of flesh and took it beating in his hand.

Will shudders as he sees his blood pulsing through clawed fingers, through sharpened teeth, and catches the hand still wrapped around his length to guide it over his hips, across the curve of his ass instead. Pale blue eyes swallowed by darkness, his gaze meets Hannibal’s, open and controlled but for the scarlet flush of his cheeks.

“If you get me before I get you,” Will breathes, “it’s yours.”

His only response is the sensation of lips and teeth parting, pressing against his skin before Hannibal bites down enough to feel, enough for the danger to pulse through Will’s blood as desire is. Hannibal could moan from the way it smells on him.

He takes the offer, lets it sit warm on his tongue, allows himself the taste of his heartbeat, frantic and alive, and resolves to let him live. To let that heart learn the power of a slow beat, of a measured rhythm. He’s determined to only ever raise it when he has Will like this against him.

He allows his hands to be guided, to draw the flat of his palms over the dip in Will’s back, feeling the muscles flex and twitch. The insinuation under the fabric of his boxers, his pants, is slow, a deliberate drawing out of pleasure that leaves Will biting back a gasp as Hannibal curves his fingers just in the delicate bend where his legs meet his hips.

Lower. His wrists positioned just so to draw the fabric down as he pulls Will up - closer to his mouth to suck his bruise deeper, higher to force Will to bend as Hannibal is - until he has him bared just enough to stroke cool fingers over his perineum in an unhurried teasing rhythm.

Then he pulls back to watch.

If Hannibal would have him open, so be it. Will’s hips jerk in response to the unfamiliar touch, lips parting slack as he presses his forehead to Hannibal’s. He allows his eyes to fall closed, unafraid of what he may not see, and he breathes hot against Hannibal’s cheek. A shiver drawn from the persistent press of fingers trickles goosebumps down his limbs and he lets his head drop back.

Neck bared, chest open, a banquet laid bare and fearless before him. Will trusts that Hannibal won't tear through him yet, bones shredding sharp through soft tissue to snare and rip Will's heart from its moorings.

Will knows that his trust isn't a guarantee that he won't.

His pulse jerks sharply as Hannibal's fingers trace a slow circle against his opening and his arms wrap suddenly tighter, a cold comfort in keeping the danger pulled fast against him. His lungs fill to splitting against his ribs as he pulls in a languorous breath and his hips roll down against the cool fingers pressing against him. Even still, he can't hide the quiet desperation in his breath across Hannibal's ear, the ache of longing in his hands as they press into Hannibal's bare shoulders.

A proud sacrifice, certainly, but hardly an experienced one.

The enthusiasm, just as the lack of experience, is not unexpected, and in this Hannibal does not rush him. Languid strokes and gentle pressure, over and over until Will's form is trembling against him, until he's lost the tension in his limbs.

"Remarkable boy." he murmurs, eyes gentle, smile just as soft. He could bend Will now, and he would go. Rest pliant on the floor, arch as he's directed.

Or on his knees, just as beautifully arranged.

Hannibal thinks, amused, of centerpieces for his table, how long he takes to arrange them and set them out, how carefully he adjusts them. Will would be quite stunning, with his cheeks flushed and his lips parted. His hair in the most glorious disarray against his face.

He looks younger. He feels like a willing sacrifice.

So Hannibal does not make him one, he does not demean Will for the trust he has given, he does not twist or manipulate him into a position. He draws his fingers in the same gentle circles, pressing and rubbing until Will makes a noise against him close to a word, a plea, perhaps, or his name. Hannibal presses the fingers of his free hand to Will's mouth, as though to silence him, but gently parts his lips instead, presses in just enough to suggest, just enough to mirror what his other hand is doing.

"Doctor Lecter," Will begs softly. Feeding his title to him in tribute, reminding them both of the worlds that still span between them. Intimacy without intimacy, or so Will would believe, as his lips part to surround Hannibal's fingers.

His eyes roll closed, tongue drawing languid against the smooth, soft skin. Will tilts his head back to encourage them deeper, throat working as he swallows against the fingers that he sees still black with blood. The same hand that must have grabbed Beverly to bring her down. The same fingers that gripped Abigail's face before he laid her low. Will gags, tongue heaving with the taste of iron blood and aluminum fear, and he remembers bringing up an ear.

Let the memories come. Let them play as Greek chorus to what he's willing to do for them. (*selfish,* whispers the soft voice in the base of his skull, as it will for years to come -

manipulative)

He grasps Hannibal's hand in his own and works his mouth in a steady rhythm against his fingers, lips damp, trailing spit as Hannibal finally withdraws them. Pinpricks gather in the base of his spine as Hannibal's fingers slide wet against his opening and he groans against Hannibal's cheek, arms looped loosely around his neck.

"I haven't - haven't done this before." As though Hannibal didn't already know. As though it needed to be said. But oh, the way Will presses honest and open and bare-chested against him as he says it, and the way his fingers fluttering find Hannibal's cock and trace firm fingertips along its length, exploring across the slick damp beads gathered at the tip - Will is like a bird playing at weakness to lure a predator towards it, fumbling and fearful and eager to distract them both from the private darkness in his corners.

The admission sends electricity down Hannibal's back, a delicious shiver he can barely contain. He'd known, more accurately he'd suspected, but to have it said so openly, almost desperately, is a beautiful sort of surrender he had only ever hoped to get from Will.

"Breathe," Hannibal murmurs, his own lips parted and damp, eyes hooded and down to watch Will's hand work against him. It's tight and good and the promise of Will trembling above him is enough to have him grit his teeth and softly groan.

He exhales as harshly as Will does, when he presses the first finger in, slick enough to not hurt, not enough to be easy. He feels Will squeeze around him, twist in his hold to sit up higher before rocking back down.

A specific sort of trust.

He draws a hand up to Will's hair, to grasp it and hold on, ground him with something. He doesn't tug it, doesn't hurt, he just holds and keeps him still, lips parted against his collarbone, feeling every twitch and shiver that runs through Will's body.

He feels his muscles pull taut when he adds another, just enough to be a stretch, enough to draw a gasp and a soft sound from the man above him.

Will forces breath into his lungs and it escapes just as suddenly, shaking across Hannibal's ear as he pulls him close again, a spasm in his hand before he grips Hannibal tighter, clinging fast to the control he has over Hannibal's body - the reactions Hannibal couldn't restrain, the hardness that pulses beneath his palm.

The fullness is satisfying, deep inside him, soothing the coiled tension gathered in his belly, a physical fulfillment to the way Hannibal has already become a part of him - sharp pain and guilty pleasure, stretching his body as he's already stretched Will's mind. A transformation into something he wasn't before - into something he didn't think he'd ever be.

He bends his back as he rocks down, twisting against the pressure inside of him, and drawing Hannibal against his chest he lets himself look - see - Hannibal's hand as it holds him, fingers delving deep to guide and expand him. A moan breaks past Will's lips when he tries to

breathe again, darkly satisfied by the pleasure that follows the lapping waves of pain that cause his thighs to tremble weakly around the older man's hips.

"It hurts," he admits, a rough whisper that he catches behind his teeth, biting his lip to stop from saying more. To hold back the confessions he knows Hannibal wants to hear.

The admission is almost satisfying, something dark uncoils its long tendrils within Hannibal and reaches forward. He stifles it. They're too far now for this to be coercion, for this to be anything but Will's choice - and he has made it. Regardless, for a moment, Hannibal slows his hand, settles it to curl over the warm skin of his buttocks, fingertips just barely pressing in.

He has no words to ease Will through this, it will hurt as any first does. As Will's mind did as it burned, before the heat became a comfort and the fingers pressed more comfortably to the trigger.

This, too, will ease with time.

He licks his lips, a brief flick of the tongue before swallowing and seeking Will's eyes, forcing the other man to meet his.

"Tell me to stop." he offers.

Were Will not so exposed already, mind and body bared to the monster beneath him, he would laugh, bitterness escaping masked in mirth at the offer of control not truly offered. At the way his own body aches for comfort and touch and affection that even this transgression feels real if he pretends enough.

He feels his heart beating hard in Hannibal's clawed grasp, desire pumping dark like blood beneath his fingers. Will stills for a breath, a consideration of whether two lies together become a truth, before he shifts to take Hannibal's fingers deeper inside him again.

"I don't want you to stop."

No, Will wants this - wants to pull pleasure uncontrolled out of Hannibal if he can't pull pain or blood or destruction yet. Something he can lay claim to, something he can leave lingering in Hannibal's mind the way that he's left smoke lingering in his office. And when he finally ends him, by violence or by law, Will wants Hannibal to remember this - how he held Will Graham soft and willing in his hands and fragile and fluttering beneath his mouth and chose not to end him then and there.

Hannibal swallows, a pleased and warm smile tilting his lips before he makes a sound Will feels more than hears, a low laugh, an acceptance of this particular move in this particular match. He tugs Will's hair just gently, just enough to have him arch before latching to the smooth skin and biting a mark against him. He'll remember. Just as Will would.

For a brief moment he removes his fingers entirely, draws them around to Will's front, between them again, to stroke him, pull the murmuring warm moans from him as his fingers slick from the precum there. When he brings his fingers back, there is less gentleness, more

urgency, and he stretches Will until the other pushes up on his knees, bends his shoulders and curves forward, thighs parting just barely at the sensation when Hannibal finds his prostate and rubs.

He finds his smile wider as he hushes the sound Will makes, scrapes gentle nails over his scalp as he does it again, to feel Will writhe and twist in his hands, words incoherent but the sentiment clear enough.

Please.

Hannibal removes his fingers and pulls back to breathe cool air over the skin damp with a thin sheen of sweat. He pulls Will closer, higher, until he's kneeling over him, hands on his shoulders for support. He can feel his own heart - faster now - beat between every two beats of Will's and sighs, eyes closing briefly.

"Would you want mine," he muses, returning to an earlier conversation, perhaps hoping Will had forgotten in his state, "If you get me first?"

He ducks his head and guides himself to line up against Will and sighs.

"I do wonder."

Then slowly, carefully, he starts to push in.

Fingers sliding from Hannibal's shoulder to rest over his heart instead, Will's head bows low. He curls his nails against Hannibal's skin, through curls of hair, and he sees himself as if in a mirror, his palm soaked with black surges of blood, his own nails tearing through the hardened muscle, tissues caught between his teeth and death pouring fresh over his lips and past his chin.

Will knows his answer, and he's grateful when Hannibal answers for him, willing to let him wonder. Grateful when the pain and pressure against him forces his response into an unsteady growl instead.

Fever hot, his body feels like an unfamiliar thing, possessed and uncontrolled. Will's muscles shake and spasm, tightening in a shuddering wave all the way up his spine, and ebbing in a shiver back down from the fingers tangled soft in his hair. His mouth falls slack, eyes closed, wholly absorbed in his own absorption, almost unmoving down to his very breath, shallow tremors quick and fast against Hannibal's cheek.

"Breathe," Hannibal whispers again, his own voice tight, breaths measured.

It's exquisite, this control, this surrender he's been given. For a price, of course, as everything. He allows Will to adjust a moment before pushing him to kneel again. He presses in again just as slow, for the moment there is enough patience, enough of his mind unoccupied to remember the ache and stretch that Will feels, that this is not yet pleasant, that it's still a possession and not a mutual give and take.

The control will hit an equilibrium, when Will finds his rhythm, when he pulls shuddered breaths from Hannibal, and Hannibal's hands leave red marks down his back in need, and want, and now.

He breathes Will's name against his skin and drops his hand between them again, cupped around Will to allow the man to take his own pleasure, keep himself on edge as long as he wants. Hannibal allows, for a few moments, to offer Will the same surrender.

The feel of his name draws Will back, eyes opening just enough to watch from so near the man he sits astride - not a monster, no, not now. Incredibly human. Someone who was once a friend. Someone who might have been so much more, not in shared horror but in innermost understanding.

A sigh, softened by pain beyond that which he feels stretching at the base of his spine, falls gentle against Hannibal's lips before Will's mouth closes over his.

When the sparking snapping of his muscles finally begins to ease, although the pain, the discomfort does not, Will allows himself to move, to take that which has been offered to him. He presses into Hannibal's grasp, rocking back slowly with an experimental roll of his hips.

"Like this?" he asks unsteadily, eyes heavy-lidded, sweat-damp curls of dark hair clinging to his brow. Suddenly young, unsure, inexperience in the dusky flush of his cheeks, in the tremor of his fingers. No pretension to teasing, no goading or posturing - simply allowing himself to be guided and bent, to give and to break.

Hannibal hums, teeth grit but lips parted on harsh breaths. He slides one hand free to rest against Will's hip and guide him to adjust just a little, enough for Will to go rigid for a moment in utter pleasure, back arched, mouth open and eyes blinking rapidly through the sensation.

Hannibal licks a warm line from Will's collarbone to his neck and noses behind his ear.

"Better." he says, fingers gripping Will harder before starting a faster rhythm, feeling Will tremble and relax, pliancy and tension playing against him like one would an instrument.

The feel of Hannibal driving deep, steady against the sensitive place inside him, the hearkening-back of his words - Will laughs, just once, and surprises himself with the sound. His hand wraps around the back of Hannibal's neck, up into his hair to keep Hannibal drawn close against his throat, tipping his head just enough to open himself up, the way he feels Hannibal opening him with each persistent pulling pushing pressing of hips.

His body aches feeling Hannibal buried deep inside him, his mind aches at the connection. He rests a hand over Hannibal's own, feeling it slide over his length, making his own adjustments - a little firmer, a little faster. Will tightens his fingers in Hannibal's hair, starting to find his own pace atop him, the pain an even keening in his ears as his hunger starts to build again.

"It hurts," Will breathes again, with a hoarseness that speaks far more of enjoyment than of warning, dripping temptation into his ear.

Hannibal groans softly, the words are pitched low enough to slither into his mind and grip, twisting until the involuntary shivers mirror Will's. He wants nothing more than to hoist Will higher, to feel him twist and bend his limbs around Hannibal to hold on, and drive into him until his voice breaks loose, unhindered.

Instead, Hannibal simply adjusts the pace to be slower, shallower, sure to hit exactly where Will will feel it with every gentle push as he curls his fingers around Will tighter to stave off the orgasm he can feel ready to vibrate Will's bones.

"Good." is all he tells him, and kisses Will's moan from his lips.

Will's breath hitches in his throat, choked short each time Hannibal presses into him, grip spasming tighter in the older man's hair. He doesn't kiss him so much as let their lips brush together, parted damp and breathless as their bodies rock together, trying to push himself down deeper on Hannibal, to stop the teasing, to allow pain to balance out pleasure.

"Fuck," Will gasps sharply as Hannibal curbs his release, the eloquence of their game forgotten as his muscles gather quick tension, thighs trembling tight, stomach squeezing, spine coiling and bringing him close against Hannibal again.

"Please," Will pleads - a whimper, a moan. "I want to feel it."

Had this been another moment, had the body in his arms not been so pliant, willing, open to him, vulnerabilities and weaknesses laid bare, aside, to feel this, Hannibal would have denied him. Would have made him writhe and beg and plead him again.

But here he can barely keep his own breathing steady, can barely force back the desperate need for release.

He kisses the corner of Will's mouth, tastes more pleas there, tastes the ghosts of other promises, and lets him go, strokes just enough to bring Will to the very brink before letting him topple on his own, bringing his hands to press against Will's shoulders and hold him as his climax pulls his muscles tight and his voice thin.

It's this. Ownership. Possession. Heightened obsession. All come to a head, hot and perfect and right there… and Hannibal follows Will moments later with a soft moan pressed to his chest, teeth parted against skin, but not biting now, not pushing, just resting and tasting and feeling everything Will gives him.

Echoes of sharp sensation call back on each other throughout Will's body, weakening with each shudder that rebounds through him, trembling frail with the release of something held far longer than this appointment or the one before it or for most of his life. Will's eyes close as he feels Hannibal undone inside of him, the hard tension of his shoulders, the restraint in the way he holds Will fast, buried deep even as his breath returns hot against Will's chest. *Stay with me*, Will remembers, *stay in the moment*, as he slides his arms around Hannibal's neck to steady them both.

As he feared, once free, he does not stand.

As he feared, once released, he pushes closer.

Hannibal was certain he would remain blameless if Will broke against him like a rock, but as their bodies soften, damp and spent and empty, Will knows that they're both broken, one against the other, waves crashing ceaseless against opposing shores.

"Overconfidence," Will murmurs, with a pale smile that never reaches his eyes.

Hannibal’s laugh is just a soft huff of air against Will’s skin. He says nothing. He thinks of self destruction. Manipulation. Selfishness.

Frustration birthed by failure.

He counts the moments against Will’s heart, that takes so much longer to slow than his own. He wonders if he’ll allow the man to smoke next time. To seep the smell and the memory into his space like an offering.

A certain kind of trust.

A certain kind of tenderness that’s born of understanding an entire being, of having that understanding returned.

Hannibal wonders if this victory really is his.

Chapter End Notes

Welp.

Uh.

We didn't anticipate this to be as intimate as it was. As heartbreaking as it was. And as long as this was. Thank you so much for sticking with us for this thing, our first fic as a collab team. It's been an awesome ride, and there is more to come :D

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!